New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1951

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1951 PRODUCTIONS
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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
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NEW YORK TIMES

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"Darkness at Noon"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 15, 1951

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Illuminated Shadows

SIDNEY KINGSLEY has made a savagely gripping and provocative adaptation of the Arthur Koestler novel, "Darkness at Noon." Taking justifiable liberties with the original, he has written and staged a terrifying and remarkably varied account of the inner workings of the Russian police state at the Alvin. Claude Rains plays the central figure of an old guard revolutionary, done in by sadistic young Soviet robots, with great clarity, power and restraint, while the surrounding company rarely falters. Moreover, there is an inspired setting by Frederick Fox to enlarge what might have been a repetitious monologue into a stirring tragedy.

• • •

Kingsley had an extraordinarily difficult task in transmuting a brooding book into a vital and compelling drama. He has achieved a singular tour de force. While enclosing Rubashov in a prison cell where his spirit gradually breaks to a point when he admits to a false confession before his execution, he has employed the flash-back technique of the screen, and tapped out conversations with other prisoners, to create a fascinating and somberly sympathetic figure. His direction has been as adroit as his dramatic construction. There are laggard and reiterative scenes in the production, but it is a fiercely lucid arraignment of communism and an affirmation by implication of the democratic way of life.

• • •

The lines of the play, most of them Koestler's, but some of them interpolated by Kingsley, leap out from the stage with a whiplash intensity. The grim talks of Rubashov with a Czarist prisoner are brilliantly contrasted by his encounters with an old fellow soldier, Ivanov, the commandant of the prison, who wishes to save his life so that his brain may be used by the party. There are glimpses of remembered revolutionary activity in Germany and France and a delicately reconstructed romance with the former Commissar's secretary whom he allowed to be shot. Always there is the inner conflict of a man whose mind is as surely imprisoned as his body in a tortured attempt to orient himself in a ruthless revolution and assay his deviations from a constantly constricting line.

• • •

Rains plays the Rubashov who might have been one of several heroes of the Russian revolution publicly purged in the Moscow trials of 1937 with intensity and subtle modulation of character which is always in flux. Particularly in his scenes with Alexander Scourby, as Ivanov, does he realize the dreadful import of "Darkness at Noon." Kingsley might well have made this conflict more salient, instead of leaving the self-castigating old radical to meet his fate with the stupid and monstrous Gletkin, grimly portrayed by Walter J. Palance. Kim Hunter wavers somewhat in the difficult role of the adoring and dissillusioned secretary, but Philip Coolidge, as the rotting Czarist officer; Will Kuluva, as a Socialist who escaped from Mussolini's castor oil treatment and Norman Roland, in the part of a peasant revolutionary, whose nightmarish execution finally breaks Rubashov, are all excellent. "Darkness at Noon" is brilliant anti-Communist propaganda, rescued from the tedium of a tract by fine stage artistry.

"DARKNESS AT NOON"

Play by Sidney Kingsley, based on the novel by Arthur Koestler; staged by Mr. Kingsley; settings and lighting by Frederick Fox; costumes by Kenn Barr; presented by the Playwrights' Company at the Alvin Theatre, January 13, 1951. The cast:

Rubashov.....Claude Rains
Guard.....Robert Keith, Jr.
402.....Philip Coolidge
302.....Richard Seff
202.....Allan Rich
Luba.....Kim Hunter
Gletkin.....Walter J. Palance
1st Storm Trooper.....
Adams MacDonald
Richard.....Herbert Ratner
Young Girl....Virginia Howard
2nd Storm Trooper.....
Johnson Hayes
Ivanoff.....Alexander Scourby
Bogrov.....Norman Roland
Hrutsch.....Robert Crozier
Albert.....Daniel Polis
Luigi.....Will Kuluva
Pablo.....Henry Beckman
Andre.....Geoffrey Barr
Barkeeper.....Tony Ancona
Secretary.....Lois Nettleton
President.....Maurice Gosfield

Synopsis: First hearing, a prison, March, 1937. Second hearing, the Same, Five Weeks Later. Third hearing, the Same, One Week Later.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

January 15, 1951

The Grim Tragedy of Revolution

By Richard Watts Jr.

That searing and memorable novel of the Moscow purge trials of 1937, Arthur Koestler's terrifying "Darkness at Noon," has been transformed by Sidney Kingsley into an engrossing and powerful play, which had a stunning first performance at the Alvin Saturday night. Brilliantly staged by Mr. Kingsley, with Claude Rains giving the portrayal of his career in an enormously exacting role, and fine supporting cast playing with unfailing skill, "Darkness at Noon" emerges as a drama of great emotional and intellectual impact that never falls into the easy primrose path of conventional anti-Kremlin hysteria.

It happens that "Darkness at Noon," both as a novel and a play, is all the more impressive as an indictment of today's Soviet Communism because the tone it takes is as rueful as it is angry and because it grants its Stalinist villains a certain terrible logic. "Our golden dream!" cries Rubashov, its doomed old Bolshevik protagonist, "what has become of it?" And the work is all the more impressive because the question is put with sorrow and not with gloating. At the end, Rubashov says, "the means have become the end," and the manner in which a great dream was changed to ruthless reality becomes the stuff of high tragedy.

Rubashov's Doom

This is, you will no doubt recall, the story of the last days of Rubashov, an old Bolshevik who had devoted his life to the Revolution, who had been ruthless and cruel and implacable in the conviction that the grim means he employed would some day result in a world of peace and brotherhood. There came a time, however, when he began to doubt and question, and he inevitably fell a victim to the endless purges. It is the story of his doubts, of his belief that he owed it to the success of the Revolution to confess, although he had never been guilty of deeds, and of his final destruction by the implacable young Gletkin, a child of the Revolution, who worshipped the ruthlessness that Rubashov had merely tolerated for an end.

Mr. Kingsley has, I think, captured the letter and the spirit of the Koestler novel with fidelity and skill. That it is not as overwhelming a play as it was a novel is undeniable. The debates in prison between Rubashov, and his old friend and now prosecutor, Ivanov, in which the prosecutor convinces him that the logic of his beliefs make his confession necessary, are not as powerful or impressive as they might be, even though Ivanov is excellently played by Alexander Scourby. I believe that the importance of Rubashov's sweetheart to his change of heart is rather overemphasized. And the ending needs a touch of theatricalism that it lacks. But the virtues are far more important.

Grim Logic

In "Saint Joan" Shaw showed the horror of religious intolerance all the more powerfully by giving its advocate such eloquent plausibility. Koestler to a great extent and Mr. Kingsley to a lesser degree does something of the same thing by making Ivanov and Gletkin, once their premise that the end justifies the means is accepted, horribly logical, and therefore, all the more terrible. The play is as angry and bitter as the novel, if somewhat less subtle. But there is sadness in it, too. The tragedy of an idealist who saw his ideals grow sour, of a mightly dream that devoured its dreamers, is dramatized with pity and terror.

As a production, "Darkness at Noon" is brilliant. Thanks to Mr. Kingsley's fine direction and the remarkable sets by Frederick Fox, the action remains in Lubianka prison but ranges through Europe in the mind of its central character. Mr. Rains, who is never offstage for a moment, is superb as the doomed revolutionist. There is a chillingly wonderful performance by Walter J. Palance as Gletkin, the sinister son of the Revolution, and Philip Coolidge gives his finest performance as the Czarist prisoner in the cell next to Rubashov's. In small parts, Herbert Ratner and Will Kuluva, as disillusioned radicals from Germany and Italy, are perfect. "Darkness at Noon" is deeply and hauntingly impressive.

The New York Times
January 15, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

For Arthur Koestler's haunting terror, Sidney Kingsley has substituted a complicated melodrama in "Darkness at Noon," which opened at the Alvin on Saturday evening. By and large, this is the same story of a party leader who is arrested, thrown into jail and made to confess to crimes he never committed; and Claude Rains gives a fine, perceptive performance in the part.

But somewhere between the novel and the theatre the intellectual distinction has gone out of the work. For Mr. Kingsley is less a writer than a showman in this theatre piece, and his melodrama comes with elements of the glib propaganda play that we find so distasteful when it is on the other side.

* * *

It starts well. It shows Rubashov, the old revolutionary, tossed into jail by the secret police. Schooled in the inhuman methods of the party, he knows what that means. But he is resolved not to conspire any further in the degradation of truth by confessing in public and putting on another gaudy puppet show for the glory of the leader.

Mr. Kingsley's play, based on the novel, follows the general plan of Mr. Koestler's narrative—the weird communication with the other prisoners by knocking, the genially cynical conference between Rubashov and the first inquisitor, the scuffles with the guards, the memories of the girl he betrayed for the party and of the foreign comrades he consigned to limbo for political divagations.

* * *

Since Mr. Kingsley is a more literal workman than Mr. Koestler, he has renounced the grim anonymity of the novel, and identified the party as Communist. Rubashov becomes very much the Trotzkyist in this sort of treatment. Throughout the play Mr. Kingsley is more specific than Mr. Koestler, and he makes his characters conform pretty rigidly to the party line.

As anti-Communist play-making this is often effective. No doubt it also comes frighteningly close to the truth. No doubt these are the elements of the reign of terror that the Communists practice on their victims for the good of the cause.

But a work of art, no matter what its theme may be, has to have its own integrity. Mr. Kingsley's theatrical method is cumbersome and diffuse. It is a parade of scenes. Speeches that would burn a hole in the mind if this came directly out of the soul of a character have a hollow sound when they are fitted into scenes. Mr. Koestler's novel was a single piece of work fashioned out of a moral attitude. Mr. Kingsley's play does not have that much distinction.

* * *

As his own director, Mr. Kingsley has chosen his cast judiciously, and he is fortunate in Mr. Rains' acting. When he last played in New York, Mr. Rains was not an actor of so much eminence. He was a showy actor, to be frank about it. But his study of the destruction of Rubashov from courage and honor to obsequiousness and futility is a sensitive, intelligent, skillful and absorbing piece of work. Everyone should feel mighty proud of the mastery and honesty of Mr. Rains' characterization.

He has some good associates in the cast. Alexander Scourby's jeering inquisitor; Kim Hunter's loyal mistress to Rubashov; Philip Coolidge's gossipy, humorous jailmate; Walter J. Palance's coldly cruel prison officer; Will Kuluva's rude but sincere foreign party-leader—give color and body to Mr. Kingsley's play. Frederick Fox has been versatile enough to construct a prison set that walls in the prisoner and also opens and closes out a number of related scenes.

"Darkness at Noon" works as a pungent, spectacular melodrama on a political theme. But it lacks the wild, evil music that made Mr. Koestler's novel so piercing and so memorable.

DAILY NEWS
January 15, 1951

'Darkness at Noon' Is a Powerful And Intellectual Modern Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Playwrights' Company's production of "Darkness at Noon," which opened at the Alvin Theatre Saturday evening, is a tour de force for practically everybody concerned. Sidney Kingsley has taken an involved novel filled with the literary tricks of the fictioneer and has made it into a grim and frightening work for the stage. In this translation he has been most intelligently supported by the scene designer, Frederick Fox, whose many scenes have splendid dramatic effect. And in the drama Claude Rains, who is on the stage every harrowing moment, is giving a full-bodied impersonation of a ruthless pioneer Communist who is discovering, too late, that he cannot forever suppress his human conscience.

I have not read Arthur Koestler's much-admired "Darkness at Noon" (tried it once, couldn't get going, tossed it aside), so am in the good position of being able to look at Mr. Kingsley's play as a play without having to make comparisons—which usually are invidious—between printed page and spoken drama. Mr. Kingsley's work, both as dramatist and director, is clean, strong and brilliant. It exposes Communist philosophy clearly and terrifyingly, and it points steadily at the weakness of this philosophy—a weakness which one day will cause its end. The weakness is, of course, the moral strength of the human being as an individual.

Not Much Excitement.

There are many scenes of great excitement in "Darkness at Noon," splendidly wrought and acted by men of the theatre, but to me they do not have the cumulative excitement of traditional stage drama. I do not wonder what is going to happen next, for I seem to know already that the next scene will fit into the pattern and will not surprise me. For emotional excitement I must substitute intellectual anticipation, for this play is not so much about what people do but what they think. It is more concerned with the whys than the hows; its story is why Mr. Rains, a cold-blooded commissar, discovers that the right of the individual is far greater than the right of the state.

As an early Bolshevik, Rains had fought a good fight for a good revolution—a revolution whose leaders thought they would benefit mankind. Somehow this idealistic purpose got sidetracked as the power of the state grew and the state was made the new God. Rains got sidetracked, too. As a revolutionary he suffered much cruelty — and he was cruel. He thought he had never permitted himself to fall in love; he was in love with the Party and this was his life. He sent men to exile, prison or death without a tremor and did nothing to prevent the execution on false charges of sabotage of the pretty secretary who was in love with him.

Enemy of the State.

As "Darkness at Noon" opens Rains has been brought to prison as an enemy of the state which he loves. In his prison, in the weeks before his execution, he wonders why he was brought here—why he was wrong or why the state was wrong. He is a Red Hamlet. His mind goes back to his zealous deeds, which seemed so fine at the time, and inevitably he begins to realize in his cell that these fine deeds were really misdeeds. When it is time for him to die he still is a believer in the Revolution, but it is a Revolution that never happened. His last words are a prayer for 180,000,000 people whom he thought he was going to liberate and who are instead enslaved.

The scenes change smoothly from life in the prison, with its inquisitions, its slave-state masters, its prisoners spelling out conversation to each other by tapping on the stone walls, to the former activities of a once-great commissar as he ranges through Europe and Russia making cruelly sure that all Communists follow the party line. They are not pretty pictures, these scenes, in or out of the prison.

Fine Performances.

Mr. Rains' performance is remarkable physically, for it is a long, hard role; but it is even more notable intellectually as he ranges in the flashbacks from heartless authoritarianism to self-doubt and finally to the conclusion that he—and Russian Communism—have been hopelessly wrong.

There are a great many other solid, vivid performances. Philip Coolidge is touching as an old Czarist who has been in prison since the beginning, whose mind has simplified itself into contemplating what it would be like to be with a woman again. There is humor as well as ruthlessness in the playing of Alexander Scourby as a prison commandant. Walter Palance, as another prison official who specializes in obtaining confessions, gives a horrifying impersonation of the modern Communist—the younger generation whose only parent, guide and God has been the state. Will Kuluva has a very fine scene as a Mussolini-hating Communist dockworker in Marseille. Kim Hunter, as the secretary, nicely represents all the love and affection there are in this heartless play, and many other well-chosen, well-directed actors have their vivid moments.

"Darkness at Noon" is the only contemporary and contemporarily important drama we have on the stage. Its message of hope is that one day Communism will defeat itself and that the majestic human soul, which is so terribly alone, will once again be free.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 15, 1951

'Darkness at Noon' Floodlights Reds

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Tragedy.
Topic—Communism.
Theme—Retribution.
Production—Ingenious.
Star—Finest.
I find—An apt warning.

Sidney Kingsley has done an amazing job in "Darkness at Noon" of dramatizing what must at first have seemed the undramatizable. His story is of a man's struggle, as death approaches, to reconcile his soul to the horrible results of misguided idealism.

Kingsley has theatricalized this effort, not as the Greeks might have, with poetry, but by amazing craftsmanship. The script is episodic. It moves freely in space and time. The thread is always philosophical. Yet the stage movement is vivid and lively and fascinating.

Early Revolutionary.

The central figure is an early revolutionary in Russia. In the play he is jailed as the curtain goes up. His crime is not falling in with the new designs and methods of Communism, not being able to accept the changes which took place while he was a prisoner of the Nazis.

Shortly he is communicating with other prisoners by tapped-out code. They include Czarists and the weak, new little traitors. His own case progresses by interviews and inquisitions at the hands of the wardens. His past builds through flashbacks.

This may seem ragged, but it is done brilliantly, shifting the interest and building the picture with inevitable detail.

Means to an End.

From his earliest days in the party, this man has believed that an end justifies the means. When hope is gone, he realizes that the evil means have become the end itself. With horrible hopeless regret, he realizes that the monster who condemns him is his own creation.

The action of the play radiates from the Spring of 1937. It is impossible not to regret that it was not written and performed some time ago. It is no longer so important to prove that this thing is true, as it is to decide what must be done about it. This play reiterates a precious element of the political conflict, but its warning cannot be clarified too much.

Unfortunately its narrative and the characters' methods are inevitable enough to nullify suspense. We have so often seen the brutal totalitarian underling at work, in ordinary pictures and television, or heard him on radio, that he has tragically become a stock character.

Gripping Sincerity.

Right on a par with the extraordinary production is the performance in the central role of Claude Rains. It is difficult to play a character who is moving neither toward triumph nor failure, but toward submission to despair. This sounds like a downhill path. But Mr. Rains gets a grip on the play, its elaborate maneuvers and the leaden finish for the idealist he portrays, that somehow makes his realization of truth suggest an ultimate peacefulness.

He makes you feel that knowing why he is damned is more important than hell fires. He is sincerity from scalp to toe.

Many of the characters, including the featured players, Kim Hunter and Walter J. Palance, are forced by the nature of the play to lack individuality to the point of colorlessness, and they abet this intention.

Intricate World.

More striking opportunities are taken excellent advantage of by Philip Coolidge as a lecherous prisoner, and Alexander Scourby as an old-line officer who compromises with the rabid younger contingent, but loses his life.

Frederick Fox has done a really ingenious job of creating a fantastically intricate world that functions without hitch through the elaborate course of the play.

Journal American

January 15, 1951

Rains Is Effective In a Stark Drama

By JOHN McCLAIN

Sidney Kingsley, a painstaking and incisive workman, has fashioned a vastly momentous drama from the ingredients of Arthur Koestler's recent novel, "Darkness at Noon."

The opening formalities took place at the Alvin Theatre Saturday night, a production of the Playwrights' Company with Claude Rains in the starring role.

This is a stark and uncompromising exposition of life behind the Iron Curtain and one leaves the theatre with a prayer of thanks for the fact that It Can't Happen Here and a rededication to the task of keeping it thus.

Aside from an enormously capable performance on the part of Mr. Rains the proceedings are aided immeasurably by an ingenious set from the workshop of Frederick Fox.

The entire action takes place in a Russian prison, but the complicated scene is so devised that the continuity within the jail is played in half the stage, yet at any point Mr. Rains can move into the other half to enact the flash-back episodes which led to his incarceration.

• • •

Effective Drama

The plot is neither unfamiliar nor unconventional, but I doubt that it has been as effectively dramatized before. Prior to 1937, Mr. Rains was a Soviet Commissar with considerable power and in good standing in the party.

He then made two serious errors, at least from the viewpoint of his superiors: he fell in love with Kim Hunter, who happened to work for him, and he shot off his mouth at an inopportune moment. He thus finds himself at the end of a one-way passage to the pokey.

The three acts of the play detail his torment and frustration in the cell, a situation dramatically heightened by the ability of the other prisoners to communicate with him through a system of tapping on the walls, plus the retrospective scenes which explain his sentence and the series of ludicrously unjust hearings leading to his execution.

Walter Palance, a towering and ominous figure, plays the part of the head guy at the prison with enough veracity and enthusiasm to set the first five rows of the audience a-tremble.

It says in the program he used to be a pretty fair heavyweight before the war and after viewing the Charles-Oma fight the other night I don't know what he's waiting for. I think he could scowl both fighters out of the same ring.

• • •

Scourby Scores

I also enjoyed the playing of Alexander Scourby, as Ivanoff, an old-line Commissar friend of Mr. Rains who also manages to louse himself up with the party; and Philip Coolidge, another inmate of the klink who has been there so long that he is able to view the performance with resignation and detachment.

Kim Hunter, as the girl in Mr. Rains' life, did not succeed ever in convincing me that she had come from Russia or even central Europe. I can't tell you why, because her performance was technically acceptable at all times. It's just that she seemed to move and look and talk much more like a native of Detroit, Michigan, which happens to be the case.

As I say, this show is superbly staged and directed with pace and precision. There will be those who will not be captivated by it, many who will consider the plot too pedestrian for so much to-do.

But a great many more, I believe, who will find it a purposeful and stimulating evening in the theatre.

Daily Mirror

January 15, 1951

'Darkness at Noon' Points A Moral for Today

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Some years ago the world outside the Iron Curtain was baffled by the famous, or infamous, if you prefer, purge trials in Moscow. Why, thinking men wanted to know, were the old Bolsheviks, the fathers of the Russian Revolution, apparently so anxious to plead guilty when they knew it meant death, or worse—lengthy penal servitude under conditions that might have horrified a czar?

In "Darkness at Noon," novelist Arthur Koestler gave some cerebral, and often moving, explanations for the paradox. Through the story of Comrade Rubashov, he showed how diabolically relentless mental and physical torture could break down even the staunchest revolutionary's morale and principles.

Rubashov believed and taught that the end justifies the means. The Revolution, achieved at any cost, was to destroy the idea of God, personal property and individual liberties. The State was to be all, was to bring abundance and happiness to the many. But what he failed to see was that Marxist revolution inevitably consumes its more sensitive, intelligent and visionary leaders; that the goons, the strongarm boys, take over and perpetuate a reign of terror.

Now, Sidney Kingsley has adapted Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" for the stage, using the original title. As presented last evening by the Playwrights' Company at the Alvin Theatre, it comes across the footlights as a harrowing, thought-provoking, introspective study of the end product of mass violence: broken intellectuals and their robot-like followers in chains.

Kingsley is a skillful craftsman. His projection of the Koestler work is literate and notably literal. He has, however, pointed a moral for today. In a brief episode, an official of the Soviet secret police reads part of a confidential memo, to the effect that the Communists won Russia in the first war and intend to win the world in the next. Mind you, that was supposed to be before World War II. How prophetic!

Playwright Kingsley has also cast and directed "Darkness at Noon" effectively. Claude Rains depicts with telling impact the disintegration of Commisar Rubashov, from arrogant authoritarian to a doubting wreck of a man. Walter J. Palance, former coal miner, prize fighter, railroad maintenance worker and ex-Air Force pilot, makes an auspicious debut in a featured role, as a soulless OGPU interrogator.

Kim Hunter, who was so excellent in "A Streetcar Named Desire," adds another fine page to her biography with a forthright and tender portrayal of a victim of love and Communist ideology. Philip Coolidge is outstanding as a tormented prisoner. Salutes, too, are due Robert Keith, Jr., Richard Seff, Herbert Ratner, Alexander Scourby, Norman Roland and Will Kuluva.

There is an impressive three-level setting by Frederick Fox. It gives fluidity to the production, and eliminates lulls for scene changes.

"Darkness at Noon" is an important play. We think it should be seen. Far from escapist entertainment, it has the macabre fascination of a metronome of doom. It ticks out mercilessly a warning to those gullibles who would thoughtlessly embrace a treacherous panacea for the world's ills, and thus sign away priceless individual freedom.

As we left the Alvin last evening, the first-nighters were cheering the new arrival.

A few of the many colleges and universities now using

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

for a record of the theatre

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Peabody College
Penn. College for Women
Penn State College
Penn. St. Tch. Coll., Ind., Pa.
Phoenix Union H. S., Ariz.

"The Royal Family"

The New York Times

January 11, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Last evening was not the best time to take an objective view of "The Royal Family," which opened at the City Center. At the end of a ragged first act, John Emery who was playing the part of a flamboyant actor, injured an ankle as he came running down a flight of stairs. It was a painful injury requiring the services of a physician immediately.

Naturally horrified at the prospect of refunding negotiable currency, Mr. Emery insisted on finishing the performance. While the physician was binding his ankle and shooting his leg full of novocaine, Ethel Griffies, who was playing the part of a veteran trouper, came before the curtain as an authentic trouper and entertained the audience with humorous stories.

* * *

Although the Center is a huge barn of a theatre, it took on the intimacy of a family meeting-room in the circumstances; and anyone who may have felt dissatisfied with the acting in the first act became a loyal lover of the drama for the rest of the evening. "The Royal Family" is a play about a family of indomitable actors. Mr. Emery and Miss Griffies attached their seals of authenticity to the legend George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber first put on paper in 1927.

If the devotion of the audience deepened after the accident, it is fair to add that the performance also improved; and by the time the third act came round, the actors were drawing the warmth and magic out of this comic valentine about the theatre. "The Royal Family" cannot have been suggested by the Barrymore clan, for the Barrymores disowned it when it was new, and the authors swore that they had never heard of the Barrymores. But it is the story of an old and celebrated theatre family that includes one riotous son who is behaving very badly in Hollywood. Anytime your correspondent started thinking of the Barrymores last evening, he disciplined himself at once and wondered how the Booths had behaved.

* * *

Here and there "The Royal Family" may look a little creaky in the joints. But at heart it is a fond and knowing portrait of the fascination of the theatre. Without laboring the point too insistently, it does manage to show the ancient differences that separate theatre people from the admirable and responsible people who are unfortunate enough not to be associated with acting and producing.

If the City Center company can play the rest of the engagement as well as it played the third act last evening, the audiences ought to have a pleasant time from now on. As the oldest member of the clan, Miss Griffies is, as usual, sharp, thorough and adorable. As her daughter, Ruth Hussey is very attractive personally and she is also magnetic as an actress.

* * *

J. Edward Bromberg is admirable as the devoted producer, giving a finished performance that catches all the sentiment and professional cunning of the role. From the first scene to the last, Peggy Ann Garner gives a beautifully planned performance as the queen of the third generation. With or without a full set of working ankles, Mr. Emery is lively and brash as the Hollywood hooligan. There are good performances also by Theodore Newton and Ossie Davis. Ben Edwards has filled the stage with one of the handsomest sets the Center has had.

Richard Whorf's direction was not working smoothly early in the evening and the clatter of discordant voices was pretty distracting in the first act. Mr. Emery's accident was the worst sort of luck for him. But it had the effect last evening of putting everybody, including the audience, on the best behavior.

According to late advice by fast courier: Dr. Shepard G. Aronson does not think Mr. Emery broke his ankle, although it will be X-rayed to make certain. And Mr. Emery does not think the Center will be refunding a nickel for the rest of the engagement.

"THE ROYAL FAMILY"

Play by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber; staged by Richard Whorf; costumes by Emeline Roche; executive producer, George Schaefer; presented by Maurice Evans, artistic supervisor, and the New York City Theatre Company at New York City Center, January 10, 1951. The cast:

Della.....Evelyn Ellis
Jo.....Ossie Davis
Hallboy.....Wendell Whitten
McDermott.....Morris Miller
Herbert Dean...Bernard Nedell
Kitty Dean.....Olive Blakeney
Gwen.....Peggy Ann Garner
Perry Stewart...Robert Webber
Fanny Cavendish..Ethel Griffies
Oscar Wolfe.....
J. Edward Bromberg
Julie Cavendish...Ruth Hussey
Anthony Cavendish..John Emery
Another Hallboy..Walt Witcover
Gilbert Marshall.....
Theodore Newton
Gunga.....Chris Gampel
Miss Peake..Marjorie Redmond
Chauffeur....Tom Hughes Sand

Synopsis: The action passes in the duplex apartment of the Cavendishes in the East Fifties, New York. Act I. A Friday in November. Early afternoon. Act II. Saturday. Between matinee and night. Act III. A year later.

DAILY NEWS

January 11, 1951

'The Royal Family' Still a Grand Play About People of the Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As I sat in the City Center last evening enjoying a performance of "The Royal Family" I got to thinking they don't make plays the way they used to. For in this comedy George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber made a theatre piece which has substance in addition to glossy humor. It pretends to be cynical about stage people, but it really is an old softy and it loves its erratic actors and actresses very much.

"The Royal Family" is about troupers—a clan like the Barrymores, as everybody has known these many years since the comedy was first produced. And there were troupers in it last evening, with John Emery giving one of those show-must-go-on performances which are a stage tradition. In the first act Mr. Emery, acting recklessly in a bravura imitation of John Barrymore, badly turned his ankle in a dash down a long stair. The intermission curtain was held a long time and during part of it another trouper, the venerable Ethel Griffies, came out and told some stories. Emery was at last patched up or given a sedative and he went admirably through the next two acts. I hope it's only a sprain and not a bad one, for Emery is most important to the performance.

One of Those Nights.

What with one thing and another the company at the City Center wasn't at its best last evening. Perhaps there hadn't been enough rehearsals, or perhaps it was just one of those nights. At any rate, even before Mr. Emery's accident, some of the players were blowing lines and giving other evidences of uncertainty. Now that the opener is out of the way, the company can get together and give an excellent comedy an excellent showing. For, as the authors themselves point out, once an actor, always an actor.

The Royal Family are the Cavendishes, actors all. They get in quarrels and scrapes, they vow they'll never again set foot on a stage, and they always go back. Not even love can keep them away from the theatre very long.

Ethel Griffies a Big Help.

Miss Griffies may drop a line now and again, but she is as steady as a rock even so, and is giving a good, salty performance as Fanny Cavendish, the matriarch of the clan. Ruth Hussey is charming as Julie, the reigning queen of the tribe, and Peggy Ann Garner is performing most appealingly as her daughter. J. Edward Bromberg seems a bit too slow and too gentle as Oscar Wolfe, the theatre manager who has the Cavendishes under his wing. Other friends and relatives include Olive Blakeney, Theodore Newton, Bernard Nedell and Robert Webber.

Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber have added new lines to their play—references to such current phenomena as television and ANTA and Bernard Baruch—which are useful. "The Royal Family" may be a revival, but it is far from being a curio, and Ben Edwards has designed for it a very handsome set. I hope Mr. Emery slept well last night and will be on deck this evening—and maybe he should just slide down those pesky stairs the way Jack Gilford does in "Fledermaus."

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 11, 1951

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Still Carries the Sceptre

MUCH of the comic exuberance and deft characterization that distinguished "The Royal Family" twenty-three years ago remains in the current revival at the City Center. The George S. Kaufman-Edna Ferber tribute to a clan resembling the Barrymores has a scintillating portrayal of the matriarch, Fanny Cavendish, by Ethel Griffies, a redoubtable characterization of her wild son, Tony, by John Emery, who upheld a great tradition of the theater by taking the last two acts in his stride after spraining his ankle, and amusing minor performances. Richard Whorf's direction leaves much to be desired as the company wanders about the cavernous stage of the Fifty-fifth Street auditorium, but the second of three revivals is nostalgic and entertaining.

* * *

Pace is what is chiefly wanting in the production. The Kaufman-Ferber lines still flash with wit, as the Cavendishes carry on a great acting dynasty through three generations. The situations range from wonderful slapstick, through sardonic thrusts at non-theatrical folk to moments of genuine poignancy. If the show does not fall into the compact and infectious unity one remembers it to have been in 1927, it is because the progression of racy incidents in the script are dispersed and frequently left hanging in the present offering. "The Royal Family" does not date badly. It does not need a few contemporary allusions which have been added to the dialogue. The trouble is that it is not the tapestry of pandemonium which once made its characters so captivating.

* * *

Miss Griffies is a tower of strength in the proceedings as the arrogant old lady nearing death who still wants to go on a tour of the tank towns. Her irresistible projection of Fanny Cavendish gathers up the full burden of the magical allure of acting for its most gifted practitioners and keeps a slim plot in some measure of focus. Her playing is every bit as good and even better than that of Haidee Wright in the original Jed Harris exhibit. Emery is a madcap prince of the family, escaping from Hollywood bondage after stealing a director's girl and punching the fellow in the nose, while Ruth Hussey is fine as the First Actress of her day.

* * *

Outstanding among others in the revival cast are J. Edward Bromberg, as the harassed but devoted manager of the Cavendish theatrical fortunes; Theodore Newton, in the part of a millionaire who wants Julie to desert the stage and see the world, which her mother sarcastically remarks she will have to do if she is going to marry the dullard, and Peggy Ann Garner, as the ingenue granddaughter whose baby son promises to extend the dynasty through a fourth generation as a great old lady dies. The Ben Edwards setting is very similar to the first one. "The Royal Family" is an engaging and affectionate account of show people which has weathered the years well.

Daily Mirror

January 11, 1951

'Royal Family' Off to Good Start Despite Handicaps

By ROBERT COLEMAN

John Emery gave one of the finest demonstrations of sheer courage we have seen in a long time at the City Center last evening. Near the end of the first act of the current revival of "The Royal Family," Emery, dashing down a lengthy staircase, turned an ankle. During intermission, several doctors were hastily summoned to attend him.

Though the ankle became terribly swollen and painful, and the medicos weren't sure whether or not it was broken, John, in the best "show must go on" tradition, insisted upon continuing. While he was being taped up, artistic director Maurice Evans and Ethel Griffies, of the cast, came before the curtain and entertained the audience.

In "The Royal Family," you may recall, George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber penned a satiric and yet affectionate picture of a gifted and temperamental stage dynasty. Its members do wacky things, but they are touched with genius. They sacrifice security and even romance for a greater love, the theatre. So, since Emery had to have an accident, it was but fitting that it should happen in this salute to indomitable troupers.

It is difficult to write a review of the New York City Theatre Company's production of "The Royal Family," because it opened last night under handicaps. Bernard Nedell, for instance, acted a Cavendish relative though suffering with laryngitis. He could hardly be heard in the farthest reaches of the huge City Center. But it really was an exciting evening, at that. And, we suspect "The Royal Family" is still an amusing play.

The magnificent Miss Griffies, as the Cavendish matriarch, was a tower of strength, unruffled, serene and always in command of the stage. J. Edward Bromberg was excellent as the harrassed and resourceful manager of the Cavendishes. Ruth Hussey and Peggy Ann Garner were effective as other members of the celebrated family.

Mention also is due Theodore Newton, Olive Blakeney, Robert Webber, Ossie Davis and Evelyn Ellis for their contributions under fire.

Richard Whorf directed, and Ben Edwards designed a first-rate setting.

When Emery reappeared in the the second act, concealing a limp as best he could, he was given a rousing and well-justified ovation. It was amazing how he put so much verve into the part of the eccentric, flamboyant Tony Cavendish, while in evident pain.

It made you more than a little proud of the theatre to see a gallant company bring off a performance so creditably in the face of such odds. It convinced you that the theatre will never die, come television or other creations of modern science.

Journal American

January 11, 1951

A Revival Highlighted By Very Fine Acting

By JOHN McCLAIN

There is a song called "There's No Business Like Show Business" which has become an anthem of sorts. The lyric for this song brings out the strange cleavage between persons who make their living as actors as opposed to all the others who don't.

If you hear it sung by Miss Ethel Merman, with her drive and authority, you will creep out of the premises with your head bent in shame for not being a member of Actor's Equity.

To a mild degree this is the synthesis of "The Royal Family," a rejuvenation of the George Kaufman and Edna Ferber drama which was very ably presented last night at the City Center Theatre with Ruth Hussey, Ethel Griffies, Peggy Ann Garner, John Emery and J. Edward Bromberg in the important parts.

The story deals with the life of an aristocratic American stage family; there is Miss Griffies, the grandmother; Miss Hussey, the daughter, and Miss Garner, the grand-daughter. And there is John Emery, the errant and talented son.

Steeped in the tradition of the stage, they present a solid front against the forces of convention as represented by Robert Webber and Theodore Newton, two nonpros who wish to marry the daughter and the grand-daughter. Over the entire proceedings lurks the figure of the grandmother, who is still getting ready for her next big part.

For me this provides believable drama, especially so since it is written with intelligence and restraint. I can understand the impatience of a young business man whose fiancee is loathe to tear herself away from the stage.

I can share, equally, the emotions of the girl who has been brought up in this traditional background and hesitates to venture afield. The same goes for Miss Hussey who, on the verge of plighting her troth, is suddenly wrenched back to reality by the simple statement that the curtain will go up in half an hour.

That is their inherent life, as inexplicable to the rest of the world as the attachment of a steeplejack to his profession.

It is no monstrous secret that this play might have been suggested by the Barrymore family and that the John Emery part represents the late John Barrymore, a renegade figure fiercely defended by the rest of the tribe in his moments of greatest travail.

Last night Mr. Emery slipped

on the stairs and twisted his ankle. This produced two noteworthy results, both in keeping with the tenor of the proceedings: (1) Mr. Emery got the torn ligaments in his ankle taped up and went on with the show, acquitting himself admirably despite his handicap and, (2) Miss Griffies came out before the curtain and told a couple of stories while Mr. Emery's injuries were being tended, thus lending authenticity to their simulated status.

Somebody, and I suspect Mr. Kaufman, has done a noteworthy job of bringing this show up to date, although I believe it is intrinsically sound for any era even without references to Rocky Graziano, etc.

Miss Griffies is magnificent as the matriarch of the family; Ruth Hussey, who has emerged as an important actress in recent years, is convincing as the daughter and Peggy Ann Garner was bright and believable as the grandchild.

John Emery, as reported, performed courageously despite his accident, and J. Edward Bromberg was relaxed and sympathetic as the producer. Richard Whorf must have turned in a good chore as director because the ceremonies moved with skill and precision.

I liked it very much.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

January 11, 1951

Ethel Griffies Keeps 'Royal Family' Alive

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Comedy, revival
Topic—Spell of the theater
Mood—Witty, sentimental
Setting—Center's best
Premiere—Eventful
The play is—Most captivating

Ethel Griffies turned out to be even more of a star than anybody, including herself, had intended, last night at the City Center's first performance of "The Royal Family."

When John Emery injured an ankle at the end of the first act, Miss Griffies volunteered an olio of anecdotes to amuse the house till the play could go on.

Mr. Emery then went valiantly into a dueling scene, and limped the least possible through the rest of the play. Miss Griffies, as the aging head of a once aristocratic family of actors, threw extra cues about her, whipped misplaced lines back into running order, and gave a grand performance.

Like The Barrymores.

It was a capital illustration of just what the play is about. If you never saw it, as I did not, in its original presentation 24 years ago, here is a real treat. Edna Ferber and George Kaufman wrote their dramatic comedy about a clan of greasepaint addicts, widely and freely identified as the Barrymores.

The tug of the theater in the blood is the whole play. Three generations feel it. With tears and vituperation, submission and adoration, they always come back. The grand old lady, who married between shows, and bore her children in Holy Week, is raring to go again. But she collapses just as her great grandchild has been formally dedicated to their profession.

Took Some Daring.

The two middle generations are variously tempted by romance. But the smell of a new play, rapidly puts them back on their fated track.

As indicated, this was no smooth or easy performance last night. There were plenty of odd moments and some mighty nervous acting. But the play is gloriously funny, and sentimental too, with what seems nowadays the most courageous daring. Sometimes the actors hung from it like an acrobat from his flying rings. It held sturdily. When everybody gets his breath, this should prove the Center's most popular achievement to date.

Miss Griffies is elegant as a walking tradition, and Mr. Emery plays her son with flamboyant snarls and spasmodic ego in one of his very best performances. Ruth Hussey, looking beautiful and handling her big scenes with dispatch, was below her par last night. She will doubtless transfer her disturbing tension to the character, once things calm down a bit.

Peggy Ann Garner is excellent as the youngest mother. She gives her big scenes a professional assertion she has nowhere revealed before.

New York Post
HOME NEWS

January 11, 1951

Tribute to an Old Stage Family

By Richard Watts Jr.

For the second production of its midwinter theatrical season, the City Center last night presented "The Royal Family," that gay and affectionate tribute to the stage and its veteran troupers by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, which Jed Harris first offered back in the incredibly distant year of 1927. What with one thing and another, the comedy about a family said to be not unlike the illustrious Barrymores shows a few signs of its age, just as the rest of us do, but there is still a lot of good nostalgic fun in it, and, on the whole, I would say its frailties are more due to the state of the drama than to the play itself.

Perhaps I am being a little unfair to the contemporary theatre and its people when I suggest that the great and abiding love for the stage that "The Royal Family" celebrates is not the widespread manifestation that it was when Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber made a play out of their relish for the idiosyncracies and the sentimental hearts of the actors of a couple of decades ago. At least, it is true that "Twentieth Century," which is pretty sardonic concerning the foibles of stage personages, has aged more cheerfully than this comedy which looks upon the thespian set with so much tenderness.

Two Performances

The tenderness and the humor are still there, and, for a large part of the time, "The Royal Family" continues to be a vastly engaging comedy. Things are, for example, considerably brightened by the zestful performances of Ethel Griffies as the matriarch of the acting family and J. Edward Bromberg as the sentimental manager who puts up with a lot from the temperamental players. But, save in their portrayals, I had a little difficulty believing that the zestful love for the theatre that is the entire spirit of the play was being authentically represented in the present revival.

Ruth Hussey, for instance, is a good, competent actress, who gave a fine performance several seasons ago in "The State of the Union." But, as Julie Cavendish, the First Lady of the Theatre, she lacks the flamboyance that the part calls for. She seemed a nice young woman giving an agreeable characterization, but I couldn't help feeling that she hadn't the style for the role of a famous star. John Emery, as the brother who bears an at least partial resemblance to the great John Barrymore, had something of the proper quality, and, if he didn't seem altogether satisfactory, that can be attributed to an on-stage accident he had in the first act, when he injured his leg but gamely went on with his work.

Miss Griffies

Incidentally, the old-time spirit of the theatre that the play pays tribute to was perhaps best represented by Miss Griffies, who came on during the long stage wait that occurred while Mr. Emery was having his injured leg attended to and told stories to the audience before the curtain. As I say, she and Mr. Bromberg have the right quality for the comedy. So has Theodore Newton as a business man who tries to get Julie Cavendish to retire from the stage. Somehow I felt that a few of the others would have been just as happy on the screen or on television, two forms of dramatic expression that the play mocks.

It is quite possible that I am being too hard on the current revival. After all, I reviewed the original production and still recall with pleasure the portrayals of Ann Andrews as Julie, Haidee Wright as the matriarch and Otto Kruger as the dashing brother. And I don't think that the comedy is aided by the authors' attempt to modernize their work by adding references to television, ANTA and Howard Hughes. "The Royal Family" was a tribute not merely to the theatre but to a particular period in its history, and, as it is done at the City Center, it seemed to me only halfway successful.

"The House of Bernarda Alba"

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

January 8, 1951

Lorca Play Pivots On Love and Hate

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Spanish drama.
Topic—Women without men.
Theme—Respectability.
Aura—Passionate frustration.
Star—Indefatigable.
I find it—A unique play.

"The House of Bernarda Alba" is the best known and probably the finest play of Federico Garcia Lorca, surely one of the most powerful of modern playwrights.

This is a story of Spain half a century ago. Its fantastic emotional power springs from the desperate suppression of five young girls by their proud mother.

The tension of the drama is created by negating natural impulses, until the situation bursts open in a panic of crazy events.

8 Years of Mourning.

The already suppressed children of Bernarda are faced with eight years of strict mourning for their father. Here in a small, dull town, they have position and are considered wealthy. Almost none of the village men are considered by Bernarda to be good enough for her daughters.

One Pepe finally woos the 39-year-old Augustias, a half-sister of the others, who has money in her own right. The youngest girl is so desperately in love with him that she would sacrifice her reputation, her honor and her standing in the town for the rest of her life. She even threatens to become his mistress after he has married the older girl.

A third sister, crippled and hopeless of love, also yearns for Pepe. She is determined to destroy the youngster's romance. When the mother finds out what is going on, there is complete and irremediable tragedy.

Believable Play.

The most remarkable element of this production is the performance of the star, Katina Paxinou, as Bernarda. She is a haughty disciplinarian to her fingertips, ramrodlike and immovable.

She dispels such force of character that the strange, remote play becomes entirely believable.

Where this production weakens is in its inability to supply the play's inherent demands for smooth ensemble playing.

Despite this, in its own way each performance has interesting color. Helen Craig is the dark, plain older girl, and Kim Stanley is the fiery young rebel. Ruth Ford is the bitter meddler, in whom I missed some explicit manifestation of the physical disability the others discuss.

Tamara Daykarhanova has some brief but quite lovely moments the maddened old grandmother. Ruth Saville seemed to me howlingly miscast as the old retainer.

The play moves gracefully. There is a particularly effective scene as all the daughters silently eavesdrop on their mother from a row of dim archways. If the direction has a major fault, it is the failure to use silence and stillness.

"THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA"

Play by Federico Garcia Lorca, translated by James Graham Lujan and Richard L. O'Connell; staged by Boris Tumarin; scenery and costumes by Stewart Chaney; incidental music by Vittorio Rieti; presented by Mr. Chaney in association with Mr. Tumarin and Lily Turner for the American National Theatre and Academy at the ANTA Playhouse, January 7, 1951. The cast:

Servant.....Marian Copp
Poncia.....Ruth Saville
Beggar Woman...Betty Morrow
Beggar Child.....Jada Rowland
Bernarda.....Katina Paxinou
Augustias.....Helen Craig
Magdalena...Sarah Cunningham
Amelia.....Mary Welch
Martirio.....Ruth Ford
Adela.....Kim Stanley
Little Girl....Florence Luriea
Maria Josepha.....
Tamara Daykarhanova
Prudencia.....Zelda Benjamin

Only Miss Paxinou makes pauses effective, and this is a play where unspoken hatreds are the bloodstream of the drama.

New York Post
HOME NEWS

January 8, 1951

The Grim Home of Bernarda Alba

By Richard Watts Jr.

Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish playwright who was murdered by his country's Fascists in 1936, is a figure of international literary importance, and the American National Theatre and Academy was fulfilling one of its proper functions when it offered his most famous drama, "The House of Bernarda Alba," as the fourth item in its subscription season at the ANTA Playhouse last night. It must be added, however, that the production provided additional evidence that the theatre of Spain does not fit any too snugly into the American stage and presents barriers that it is not easy to cross.

"The House of Bernarda Alba" is a somber and brooding tragedy about a family of girls ruled over by a grim and tyrannical matriarch who seeks to suppress their natural instincts in the interest of her own stern social code. With the father dead, the mother drives the young women into a lengthy period of mourning in which they are to be cut off completely from association with men, with the not altogether surprising result that they are filled with bitterness, hatred and general unrest and the youngest of them commits suicide after it had been discovered that she was having a secret love affair with the eldest daughter's fiance.

Conflict

The conflict between natural instincts and the forces that try to suppress them seems to be one of the dramatist's favorite themes, and there is no denying that, in "The House of Bernarda Alba," he goes about his story with a single-minded intensity that is capable of engendering considerable dramatic power. Although on the English-speaking stage there appears to be a certain artificiality in the theatrical style of Garcia Lorca, it is still evident that he is a playwright of authentic tragic force. There are moments in the play that are highly impressive in their concentrated emotion.

The mood of ominous impending doom that hangs over the unhappy household of savage old Bernarda is captured in both the writing and the production with effective skill and presents the most successfull feature of the drama. But the tragedy itself, it seems to me, is made less moving and believable than its materials should make it through a kind of artifical stylization that may be eloquent and hauntingly lyric in the original Spanish but is a little flat and unpersuasive in its English translation. The final effect, which might have been devastating, is somehow far from overwhelming.

Katina Paxinou

For me, one of the troubles with the play's effectiveness is the acting of Katina Paxinou as the matriarch. I have now seen Miss Paxinou on the stage in "Hedda Gabler" and on the screen in "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "Mourning Becomes Electra," and I must confess that her art continues to escape me. There is something about her highly mannered style that seems to me grotesque and extravagant, rather than powerful and moving, and this struck me as being all the more noticeable last night because that style happened to be contrasted with the less ornate playing of the other members of the cast.

Such interesting young actresses as Ruth Ford, Helen Craig, Mary Welch and Kim Stanley are prominent in the all-woman cast, and they all play skillfully, but I couldn't escape the feeling that they were in a different play from the one in which Miss Paxinou was appearing. The set and the costumes by Stewart Chaney and the direction by Boris Tumarin are of help in creating the mood that is the most successful feature of "The House of Bernarda Alba," and I certainly agree that the tragedy was worth doing. But I am also sure that Garcia Lorca must have been a finer playwright than he seems in the American theatre.

The New York Times

January 8, 1951

Katina Paxinou in 'The House of Bernarda Alba' From the Spanish of Lorca

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Katina Paxinou has discovered a suitable part in "The House of Bernarda Alba," which opened at the Anta Playhouse last evening. She plays the tyrannical mother in another Spanish pastoral drama by Federico Garcia Lorca, the playwright and poet, whose "Blood Wedding" appeared in the New Stages schedule in 1949.

In "The House of Bernarda Alba" he is more poet than playwright. For this study in country cruelty is not so much a drama with plot and theme as a tone poem that evokes a dark mood. A widow with five daughters condemns all but one of them to incarceration at home because she believes that none of the men in the village is worthy of her family.

* * *

What she requires of her daughters seems simple to her. But it is inhuman to them. They hear the voices of men in the fields. They peek out at the men through the lattice. Although their mother's will is ironbound, it cannot cool their blood or stifle their youth. In another vein, "The House of Bernarda Alba" might be bucolic comedy. But Lorca's mood is somber in this play and it concludes with tragedy.

Uneventful and unsubstantial as a drama, "The House of Bernarda Alba" is a difficult piece to act by a company collected for one engagement. It needs to be performed like a dance, or like the exquisite marching song played off-stage in the second act with so much ease and beauty.

* * *

Stewart Chaney has enclosed the performance in a lovely, simple setting that is softly lighted. As the virago, Miss Paxinou gives a superb performance. Her widow and mother is bitter and acid and also extraordinarily powerful. She darts around the stage like a flame. She presides over her household with monstrous authority. Give Miss Paxinou the proper part and she can set a play on fire and also singe the audience.

There are some good actors in the other parts—notably Ruth Ford, Helen Craig, Kim Stanley and Tamara Daykarhanova; and they do as well as they can in the circumstances. But it is to be feared that Boris Tumarin's direction is not lyric enough to make art out of the group performance, which is a medley of individual styles and personalities. It cannot stand comparison with that daintily written marching song that Vittorio Rieti has composed. Lorca needs music in the acting. He wrote out of mood more than out of mind.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

January 8, 1951

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Baleful Tragedy

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA'S "The House of Bernarda Alba" has afforded the American National Theater and Academy with a baleful and arresting tragedy for its fourth production. Played with great power by Katina Paxinou and a number of intense assistants, the new ANTA offering has breadth, eloquence and cumulative terror. The symbolism of the Spanish dramatist who was killed by Fascists in 1936 is tempered here by lucid exposition, recognizable characters and high melodrama. Although dire events are unrelieved, they are not marred by the stylistic pretensions from which his "Blood Wedding" suffered when it was presented by New Stages two seasons ago.

* * *

In "The House of Bernarda Alba," the Academy has the sort of drama which it was organized to sponsor. It would have short shrift in the commercial theater, but it is a work of stature which demands attention from those who care about the heritage and potentialities of the stage. Fortunately it has Miss Paxinou, as the widowed lady of the title, blacking out her small village household with an eight-year period of mourning, keeping a crazed mother in hiding and destroying the happiness of five unmarried daughters. It is a dark and forbidding portrayal, projected with such skill and passion that it has some of the heroic proportions of Greek tragedy.

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James Graham Lujan and Richard O'Connell have translated the play in terse and sometimes idiomatic speech, underlining the few moments of savage humor, but centering the action squarely where it belongs. Even the opening scene, with a chorus of mourning women paying obeisance to a tyrannical matriarch, gives explicit forewarning of the storm that is to burst within the Alba clan, setting sister against sister and culminating in a shooting and a suicide. Stewart Chaney has created a fascinating setting with the daughter's bedrooms resembling the cells of a nunnery in which they are unwillingly imprisoned, while there is effective incidental music by Vittorio Rieti.

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Miss Paxinou is so terribly magnificent that the proceedings always flow in and around her characterization, even when she is not on stage. Meanwhile Ruth Saville plays a hate-consumed housekeeper with a sordid past ably and Kim Stanley makes a frightening person of the daughter who steals her older sister's fiancee. Helen Craig and Ruth Ford are striking as two of the desiccated virgins and Tamara Daykarhanova is chilling as the mad grandmother. Boris Tumarin has directed the production to accent its latent violence brilliantly. "The House of Bernarda Alba" is a grim but notable production.

DAILY NEWS

January 8, 1951

ANTA's 'House of Bernarda Alba' Makes Playgoing a Serious Task

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Continuing its passionate pursuit of the theatrical verities, the American National Theatre and Academy last evening presented "The House of Bernarda Alba," by Federico Garcia Lorca Spanish poet who was excuted by the Fascists during the Spanish civil war. This little dandy is from the oh-the-pain-of-it, or Civic Repertory, school— a form of drama which has always given me the willies.

It could be that there is some art in "The House of Bernarda Alba" and that I am insensitive to art in so pure and ghastly a form. Perhaps I should not have laughed when Katina Paxinou, upon learning that one of her five miserable daughters has just killed herself in one of the swiftest suicides on record, let out a screech like a wounded eagle and doubled herself up like a swimmer with a cramp. Perhaps, indeed, I should not have gone at all to the ANTA Playhouse.

In the drama Mme. Paxinou, a Greek actress with a strong face and a strong accent, is the mother of a brood of wenches who never have any fun. The old hag keeps them in the house all the time, beats them with her cane and sends them to their rooms every few minutes. About the only fun any of them has is talking to a man through a barred window, Spanish style.

Some Fast Work.

Except one girl. In a manner which is not quite clear, she manages a frolic now and then. One time, when she comes in trailing a few symbolic wisps of hay, Mother Paxinou roars, "My gonn!" and speeds offstage. One second later something goes boom offstage. The girl runs upstairs and kills herself in a couple seconds more—just how is not detailed, but a servant who has gone to investigate reports that never before did anybody die such a terrible death. Mother Paxinou was gunning, of course, for the man in the case, but he escaped—in a cloud of hay, no doubt. "I missed," Mother Paxinou confesses. "Women cannot aim."

The servant, by the way, looks and talks like a female Hiawatha. There are many poetic lines in the drama, translated by James Graham Lujan and Richard L. O'Connell. I copied one down, as follows: "May the pain of the piercing nail wither her eyeballs."

The company, all women except for offstage voices, includes Marian Copp, Helen Craig, Sarah Cunningham, Mary Welch, Ruth Ford and Kim Stanley. Boris Tumarin directed what there is to direct—which isn't much, because "The House of Bernarda Alba" is mostly expositious or repetitive. Stewart Chaney did the set and costumes—a Spanish room and some black mourning dresses.

Daily Mirror

January 8, 1951

'House of Bernarda Alba' Grim Study of 5 Women

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Stewart Chaney, Boris Tumarin and Lily Turner must have presented Federico Garcia Lorca's "The House of Bernarda Alba" as the fourth play of ANTA's 1950-51 subscription series, primarily for students of the European drama. We do not think it will appeal to the average playgoer. At least, we heard grumbling from some of the customers as we exited from the ANTA Playhouse last evening.

"The House of Bernarda Alba" is a grim study of five frustrated women crying for men. They are ruled with a rod of iron—only in this case it's a silver-topped walking stick — by a tyrannical mother. As if to deepen the gloom in the Alba household, there is a crazy grandmother, usually kept chained and gagged to prevent her from making scenes before the neighbors.

The eldest of the Alba girls, who has inherited the biggest portion of her late father's fortune, finally becomes engaged to one Pepe Romano. We judged from the script that he wasn't considered much of a catch, but seemed the best the forlorn village had to offer in the way of a suitor. He appeared to be the most fascinating character in the play, and we can only regret that Senor Lorca was merely content to talk about him.

The youngest of the Alba daughters finally escapes from her miserable house, in her best chemise, for a tryst with Pepe. Discovering this, a jealous sister arouses the family, and the dour Bernarda Alba takes down her shotgun and peppers the romantic swain with a load of buckshot. Thwarted, the hapless girl takes her life.

The evening's morbidity was relieved a little by the shotgun episode, which drew a big laugh. The first-nighters also got a chuckle or two when a bossy housekeeper ordered a serving girl to turn out an oil lamp. After the servant had wrestled with the obstreperous prop for a few seconds, the housekeeper covered for an errant electrician by suggesting that she leave it on, after all. Whereupon the temperamental light went out.

In directing the drama, Tumarin has sought for the scope of Greek tragedy, and, on occasions, has come perilously close to caricature. Katina Paxinou, who has won fame in films etches Mother Alba with broad and effective strokes. Kim Stanley, Ruth Ford, Mary Welch, Helen Craig, Sarah Cunningham, Ruth Saville and Tamara Daykarhanova get all from their roles that Lorca penned into them.

Miss Stanley is particularly outstanding as the youngest and most unfortunate of the Alba daughters. Her performance is well worth the attention of our commercial managers. She has the equipment to be a star.

Chaney has designed an atmospheric setting and appropriate costumes.

"The House of Bernarda Alba" is interesting as an example of Lorca's dramaturgy. It is a bitter, violent picture of life in a mean, cruel Spanish village at the turn of the century. But we doubt that there will be a rush at the ANTA box-office for tickets.

Journal-American

January 8, 1951

Highly Confusing And Improbable

By John McClain

THE A.N.T.A. presented last night at their Playhouse their fourth offering of the season, "The House of Bernarda Alba," by Federico Garcia Lorca and starring Katina Paxinou.

It is a tale of the horrendous frustration of Senora Alba's five daughters, who are virtually prisoners in their own home—such being the old Spanish custom at the time.

Due to the inability of the author, or the director, or both, to keep five dolls in the air for three acts, I found the entire effort highly confusing, improbable and sometimes unintentionally hilarious.

Miss Paxinou, as the mother, dominated the proceedings throughout, giving vent to wild gestures and excruciating roars of anguish.

The daughters, I thought, were uniformly proficient, although they were moved about madly all evening, up and down stairs, in and out of doorways, one giggling, one sobbing, one screaming, one fighting and one unfortunately, asleep.

If that doesn't give you enough action, there also is an idiot grandmother who is chased in and out at regular intervals, babbling and singing.

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Eligible Dashing

To be specific, it seems that Senor Alba has just gone to his last reward and his widow, Miss Paxinou, is determined to enforce the most rigid rules of mourning upon her household.

This involves the five girls, four of her own and one who came to her along with the late lamented. She was the product of Sr. Alba's first marriage to a very wealthy lady who died and left the girl her fortune.

So, of all the five dolls this one, older and less attractive than the others, is the only one engaged. The fortunate fellow is Pepe Romano who, although never seen, is apparently the most eligible and dashing fellow in the small Spanish town. Not only that, but hep. He could have had any of the other four, younger and prettier, but he liked the loot.

Well, as it turns out, he didn't —not really. All the time he was fooling around with Adela, the youngest. In fact, on the very eve of his marriage he arranges to run away with her, and might have gotten by with it except for the intervention of Martirio, another sister who has a sneaker for him. When the mother hears about all this she utters the most unexpected line in the play. She says, simply, "Where is my gun?"

I refuse to tell you more.

* * *

Highly Improbable

This is one of those plays you find almost immediately acceptable or not. Unfortunately I did not. I do not doubt that such persons lived and behaved in some such fashion in the year 1900 in Spain, but last night's charade made it seem highly improbable.

Despite this, I thought Ruth Ford and Kim Stanley were quite properly uninhibited in their performances as Martirio and Adela, respectively, and Helen Craig, as the rich and jilted sister, made her fate seem plausible.

Sarah Cunningham, as second-eldest sister, was sufficiently long-suffering, and Mary Welch, who giggled and sobbed a lot, seemed much too seductive not to have slowed up the devastating Sr. Romano herself. That takes care of the five sisters, and it's like trying to record a day in the lives of the Dionne quints.

Miss Paxinou was, I believe, somewhat too emphatic at times. There was no motive in the play to indicate why she should consistently behave toward her daughters like the head-mistress of a school for wayward girls. As an authority on the behavior of demented Spanish grandmothers of the late 19th Century I can assure you that Tamara Daykarhanova was excellent.

There are many persons who will like "The House of Bernarda Alba," but I don't think there will be enough.

"Second Threshold"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 3, 1951

By HOWARD BARNES

Happy New Year!

A DRAMA of great eloquence, depth and feeling has distinguished the season at the Morosco. "Second Threshold," written by the late Philip Barry with revisions by Robert E. Sherwood, is an illuminating reflection of our time. A compound of frustration, latent tragedy, passion and high hope, it speaks with vivid clarity and emotional urgency to an audience. Clive Brook, Margaret Phillips and their colleagues play it in the manner it richly deserves under Alfred de Liagre, jr.'s inspired direction. Here is a play of which the theater can be immensely proud.

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The Sherwood revising of Barry's first draft has been a work of artistry and affection. It is impossible to tell where one eminent author has edited another, employing the latter's notes to superb advantage and giving a clean line to the rough and undisciplined original. As it stands "Second Threshold" is all of a piece and tremendously engrossing. Its tale of a great lawyer, exhausted by war service, and seeking death as a release for himself and the daughter he loves, is both heroic and pertinent. The characters have theatrical stature, but they are so recognizable that one can really reach out and touch and know them. The tension of the work mounts with a steady poignancy to an electric climax.

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Clive Brook, who is appearing on the stage here for the first time, was a masterly choice for Josiah Bolton, who remembers the threshold of the typical commencement address and considers the second threshold of an anteroom between life and death. The actor creates a bleak and terrible figure, talking to an apparition in his Tenth Street garden and filled with the futility of the world, his own life and that of the daughter whom he has almost made over into his own image. There is dignity, wry humor and profound meaning in his portrayal. It is matched perfectly by the brilliantly modulated characterization of Miranda Bolton by Miss Phillips, as she tries to cut herself off from her father but finally succeeds in saving him and herself from an intellectual and emotional impasse.

Although the central relationship is clearly stated in "Second Threshold," it is never given undue psychiatric underlining. It is merely a part of a splendid dramatic whole, giving motivation to Miranda's confused efforts to save Josiah from self-destruction and making her mature to the point where she calls off an engagement to a wealthy Englishman twice her age to marry a fine young doctor. Both Brook and Miss Phillips handle the basic conflict and its resolution with unerring authority delicacy and conviction. As good as he is in the part of a man shocked by the war and subsequent events into a quest for the death he envisages as an enormous room or o stuffy closet, Miss Phillips brings the play a particular radiance which makes the ending genuinely exultant.

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The lesser roles are handled adroitly. Hugh Reilly is sardonic, intensely loyal and passionate as the young doctor who starts to save one human being and ends up by saving two. Betsy von Furstenberg is likable and wonderfully amusing as the college youngster who confunds a desperate aging hermit with bobby-sox doings and Frederick Bradlee has an incisive bit as the Bolton son, who turned down a law career for acting. Donald Oenslager's spacious setting gives excellent scope for the portentuous events of a twenty-four-hour period last July. Barry, and after Barry Sherwood, have brought impressive figures to a stage in "Second Threshold" and given them matters of enduring consequence to engage in. A fine and memorable drama has come to town.

"SECOND THRESHOLD"

Play by Philip Barry with revisions by Robert E. Sherwood; staged by Alfred de Liagre, Jr; scenery and lighting by Donald Oenslager; presented by Mr. de Liagre at the Morosco Theatre, January 2, 1951. The cast:

Toby Wells.....Hugh Reilly
Malloy.....Gordon Richards
Miranda Bolton.....
Margaret Phillips
Josiah Bolton.....Clive Brook
Thankful Mather.....
Betsy von Furstenberg
Jock Bolton..Frederick Bradlee

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in the library of Josiah Bolton's house on West Tenth St., New York, in the course of twenty-four hours late last July. Act I. Friday night. Act II. Scene 1. Saturday noon. Scene 2. Early that evening. Act III. Saturday night.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 3, 1951

'Threshold' Strong on Emotion

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Comedy drama.
Topic—A second chance.
Theme—Pride thwarts heart.
Nature—Civilized, gracious.
Credit—Suspense.
I find—Real emotional power.

"Second Threshold" offers a highly absorbing evening which works up into an emotional experience of real impact. Paradoxically, it made me unhappy, because it is the last play of the late Philip Barry, and because it is a sort of play which is not likely to be written in the future.

Barry, who died a year ago, turned out 23 plays in less than 30 years. Many of them were big successes, and even more of them have an everlasting quality about them.

"Second Threshold" has the smoothness, the wit, the simplicity and the penetration that marked his work at its best. It is no longer fashionable to write about the suffering of people who are well off. Barry usually did, but the absence of economic conflict served to clarify the emotional problems he stated, and made them intensely intimate.

No Artificial Pacing.

This last work of his runs little more than two hours, and it is played with no artificial effort to achieve pace. But this does not mean that the script is thin. On the contrary its relationships are distilled. They become crystalline with a minimum of fuss and the conflict is dissolved in a shattering final scene.

The play concerns a father and daughter relation. It is developed in such a way that the onlooker is not quite clear about the true reason for the man's great dejection until a few minutes before the end.

The girl is about to sail for England to marry an old friend of her father, when she is summoned home by a young doctor. Evidence points to her father's having attempted suicide. There seems to be no explanation for his state of mind, other than spiritual lassitude. He is divorced, his children have grown away from him, having never been particularly intimate, and he has given up his prominent position in the government.

Doors of Experience.

The daughter tries in every way she can think of to stimulate her father's interest in life. It is only when she is reduced to expressing her own emotions, which he has taught her to hide for the convenience of his possessiveness, that she is able to strike a spark of interest.

The production is distinguished by the highly polished and understanding performance of Clive Brook as the father, in his American theatrical debut.

Mr. Brook, so well known for his picture appearances, strikes the most perfect kind of balance between playing to the other characters, but entirely for the benefit of the audience. He is relaxed but deeply troubled, always characterized by a worldly sense of humor.

Completely Mental.

Margaret Phillips is entirely sincere, and thus authentic as the daughter. The play would miss its point if she were not cool and completely mental. She wins no affection at first, then eventually bursts wide open emotionally, and seems surprised that she can touch other people. I felt her completely loyal to the author's intention.

Betsy Von Furstenberg is enchanting as a feather-brained debutante, who is everything feminine the other girl has scorned. She is particularly artful as she tries to lure her friend's father.

Hugh Reilly makes an intense and good-humored young doctor.

Alfred de Liagre, the producer, has directed the play with the sort of calm that would mark the lives of such cultured, unemotional people. The performance last night seemed rather too deliberate at the start, but this carefulness will disappear with more relaxation.

The New York Times

January 3, 1951

'Second Threshold,' the Last Play From the Pen of Philip Barry

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although Philip Barry's last play is gaily written, it is sad at the heart of things. It is called "Second Threshold," and it was put on at the Morosco last evening with Clive Brook in the central part. This is the play that Mr. Barry had not quite finished when he died on the third of December, 1949. Since then his friend, Robert E. Sherwood, has revised the script for the current production.

Despite the silken style in which it is written and the witty observations in the dialogue, "Second Threshhold" is sad because it is wholly concerned with the soul sickness of an eminent man who no longer wants to live. He is Josiah Bolton, who has had a spectacular career in some sort of public service that the play never defines.

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But now that he looks back over the years he sees an emptiness and an egotism that disgust him. Grand as the career seems to be from the outside, it looks mean to him as he analyzes it in the privacy of his mind. "Second Threshold" is the story of how his daughter saves him from destroying himself by supporting him with her love and loyalty. Incidentally, she also saves herself.

Mr. Barry was a sensitive man whose perceptions reached under the surface of life. He was preoccupied with meaning and wonder; he searched around amid the intangibles for something with significance and he was also an artist. "Second Threshold" is spun out of the intangibles—shadows of a hidden past that haunt the present, elusive speculations about the motives of the characters, problems of loyalty, confusion and faith.

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Since Mr. Barry was an artist, the dialogue is light and dextrous in the humorous style of some of his best comedies. Despite its preoccupation with death, "Second Threshold" looks and sounds like the sort of crackling comedy of manners that only he and a few other moderns could write. He had remarkable taste and skill for the drawing-room galeties. But his last testament to the theatre, played inside a pleasant library designed by Donald Oenslager, impresses one theatregoer as melancholy and sad, as though the problems of Josiah Bolton were in part those of Philip Barry. Technically the ending is happy. But the mood of the whole play is rueful and disenchanted.

Everyone concerned with the production has conspired to give "Second Threshold" a winning appearance in the theatre. Alfred de Liagre Jr. has directed the performance with affectionate interest in Mr. Barry's theme. As the troubled man of affairs who is closing up shop on life, Mr. Brook gives an immensely skillful performance, putting a sardonic, dryly fashioned surface on a heavy-hearted character. Mr. Brook has brilliantly mastered a character composed chiefly of thoughts and reflections.

As the daughter who responds to her father's spiritual needs, Margaret Phillips plays with force and lucidity. Hugh Reilly is excellent as the physician troubled by a sickness he cannot cure with medicines. As an adolescent coquette on an earlier threshold of life, Betsy Von Furstenberg gives an amusing performance that defines the significance of the character to the play. Frederick Bradlee, as the son, and Gordon Richards, as the household servant, complete the small cast with good performances.

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For all its bright and immaculate appearance on the stage, "Second Threshold" is a thoughtful and moving play. It is moving, not only because of its story, but because these were Mr. Barry's lonely thoughts in the last year of his life.

Daily Mirror

January 3, 1951

'Second Threshold' Does Not Get to 1st Base

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Second Threshold," which Alfred de Liagre, Jr., brought to the Morosco Theatre last evening, is a thin, cynical and confused comedy. It boasts some passages of brilliant writing, naturally, having been penned by the late Philip Barry and revised by Robert E. Sherwood.

The play has to do with a distinguished legal and political figure, determined to take his life in a seeming accident, because he is embittered by the state of the world and by his failure to hold the affection of any of the members of his family. He is particularly furious with a daughter, engaged to wed an important Britisher twice her age, probably because the suitor is so much like himself.

The daughter is about to sail for London to be married, when a boyhood playmate, now a doctor, tells her just how serious the father's condition really is. Though she has tried to be as brittle and impersonal as her sire, the girl now lets her emotions go, sparks her parent back to a desire to live and cancels her wedding in favor of a future marriage with the young doctor.

The play is so short that we felt Barry and Sherwood gave themselves too limited a time in which to develop satisfactorily the characters, their relationships, their basic philosophies and mental attitudes. It is a bitter script which doesn't get much below the surface, into the minds and hearts of its people.

De Liagre is a perfectionist, a meticulous craftsman. He spent many months casting "Second Threshold." He finally signed Clive Brook for the father and Margaret Phillips for the daughter. Under his adroit direction, they give magnificent performances and even invest their vehicle with a semblance of depth.

This, incidentally, marks Brook's American stage debut, though he is well known to our film audiences. He has two excellent scenes in the second act, and brings them off beautifully. One is a lively take-off on a song-and-dance skit performed during undergraduate days at Harvard.

Miss Phillips you may recall from "The Heiress," and somehow last night we kept remembering the cold father-daughter relationship in that dour drama.

Salutes also are due Hugh Reilly, Betsy Von Furstenberg, Frederick Bradlee and Gordon Richards.

There is an attractive setting by Donald Oenslager.

"Second Threshold" has a goodly quota of both tense and amusing moments, but hardly sufficient for a full evening.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

January 3, 1951

The Last Play by Philip Barry

By Richard Watts Jr.

The late Philip Barry's final play, "Second Threshold," with revisions by Robert E. Sherwood, is a thoughtful, intelligent, agreeably "literate" study of a distinguished man of middle years, who finds that life has lost its savor. Skillfully and attractively acted by Clive Brook, Margaret Phillips and a good cast, this posthumous work by one of America's most notable dramatists, which opened at the Morosco last night, provides an adult and steadily interesting evening in the theatre, even though it is curiously lacking in emotional and dramatic forcefulness. Its appeal is rather to the mind than to the heart.

I found it continuously absorbing, and yet in some ways it is oddly exasperating. For all the striking interest of its subjects and its graceful writing, it seemed to me genuinely moving only in Miss Phillips' final scene, and I had the feeling that it more frequently skirted its topic expertly than faced it resolutely. While engaged in my reservations, I must add that its last-act solution of its problem struck me as too abrupt to be completely convincing, and that I had some difficulty in believing that its protagonist was really bent on suicide. There was the uncomfortable suspicion that he was enjoying scaring his children.

Lost Generation

Although all of this keeps "Second Threshold" from being as fine as the attractiveness of its writing, the excellence of its acting, and the general expertness of its production should have made it, I repeat that there was never a moment when my attention wandered from it. If I questioned the motives of the father and suspected that the problem of the eminent political figure, who feels deserted by both life and his children was not always contemplated squarely, I have no doubt whatever that the case of the eminent member of a lost elder generation is provocatively stated in a provocative play.

Just how much Mr. Sherwood contributed to the script left by Mr. Barry, it is, of course, not entirely possible to say, but it is enough to state that "Second Threshold" has the ring of the deceased playwright's style and that it has the proper smoothness

"Second Threshold"—*continued*

of a completed work. The problem remains as to why the play can be so interesting and still so lacking in persuasive dramatic emotion. I think it must be charged to both the slightly equivocal portrait of the central character and the somewhat glib suddenness of the solution. These, I believe, are unquestionably defects, but the virtues of theme, prose style and acting transcend them.

The Players

Certainly, things are vastly aided by the performances of Mr. Brook and Miss Phillips. Mr. Brook, a famous veteran of the cinema's golden days, has the personal distinction to make the protagonist believeable as a man of character and importance and the acting skill to make him interesting and engaging, even when his presumably sympathetic conduct is slightly suspect. As the daughter, Miss Phillips continues to prove that she is the ablest of the younger actresses, and, as I have already said, she gives the play its one really important emotional moment. Here are two portrayals that are of enormous importance to their play's value.

In addition, there is vast help by Hugh Reilly and Betsy von Furstenberg in slightly lesser roles. Mr. Reilly brings the required forthrightness and conviction to the part of the young doctor who tries to straighten out the suicidal father and his estranged children. Young Miss von Furstenberg, in her local stage debut, gives most engaging freshness, charm and humor to the charmingly written role of a naive Boston girl who is eager to help out in the famous man's problems. Mr. de Liagre's staging is smooth and expert and Mr. Oenslager's set in the right mood. Despite my complaints, "Second Threshold" proves how much Philip Barry is going to be missed.

Journal American

January 3, 1951

Barry's Last Play Proves Stimulating

By JOHN McCLAIN

It is tragic indeed that Philip Barry did not live to attend the opening of his last play, "Second Threshold," which was presented last night at the Morosco Theatre by Alfred de Liagre Jr., for he would have been greatly gratified. It is a profound, incisive and stimulating evening in the theatre.

The billing in the program states that "revisions" are by Robert E. Sherwood. This means that Mr. Barry died before the drama was in its final presentation stage, and that Mr. Sherwood thereupon took over and brought it down to the starting gate.

One can only say that, not knowing quite where Barry left off and Sherwood began, there could not have been a more sympathetic union of talents.

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Distinctive Dialogue

There is a distinctive Barry-type dialogue, recognizable to all aficionados, and this has been maintained throughout at its highest level.

Apart from the writing, there is a memorable performance by Clive Brook, who is probably best remembered as a former movie actor, and a lesser though noteworthy effort on the part of Margaret Phillips, as his daughter.

Mr. Barry's story concerns the conflict between these two. Mr. Brook, a retired gentleman of eminence and wealth, has developed a suicidal neurosis requiring the aid of a physician. This is the means of introducing Hugh Reilly, the chief medic's assistant, into Mr. Brook's household.

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Problem Solved

It then develops that the cause of most of Mr. Brook's disorder is his affection for his daughter, who is on the verge of going abroad to be married.

Mr. Reilly becomes aware not only of this but proceeds further to solve the problem by being so attractive that the daughter goes for him, instead.

There is a sub-plot involving Brook's son, played by Frederick Bradlee, and his little girl friend, Betsy von Furstenberg, who develops a decided sneaker for the old man.

I thought Clive Brook was assured and magnificent in the big part. Margaret Phillips seemed too-teddibly tense as the daughter, although she may reasonably quiet down as the festivities proceed.

The others certainly qualified for that horrible word: "adequate."

The entire action of the play takes place in Brook's home on W. 10th st., New York, and for such Donald Oenslager has produced a most believable set. Mr. de Liagre directed with skill and sympathy.

DAILY NEWS

January 3, 1951

Clive Brook Adds Great Charm to Barry's Play, 'Second Threshold'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Second Threshold," by the late Philip Barry, with revisions by Robert E. Sherwood, has a quality which should be inherent in all plays—the seemingly simple and natural one of conversation. It is only when we see a play like Barry's—and this one, the last, was given a very fine production at the Morosco Theatre last evening—that we realize how few dramatists there are who really know what to do with conversation.

In the theatre some people talk to each other. Many more talk at each other. Too few encourage any talk at all. They—the characters being played upon a stage—spend their time talking across the apron to the audience for whatever immediate effect they may achieve, and never stop to think what might happen if they paid a little attention to one another.

In "Second Threshold" the people involved are not merely interesting to the audience; they are interesting to each other, and so they react to each other—and that is the way to make decent conversation. This last of the Barry works is, therefore, intelligent, grown-up and witty. It's not a great comedy, but it has excellent style and is being given an admirable performance by a company headed by Clive Brook.

A Belated Debut.

Mr. Brook, who has been known to a generation or two of moviegoers, is making his first stage appearance here in "Second Threshold." He's like a younger A. E. Matthews—if the venerable Mr. Matthews will excuse my suggesting that anybody could be younger than his lovable self. Mr. Brook is crisp, assured and gifted with subtle humor as he plays the role of a rich and crusty father who, believing that his daughter and son have grown beyond and away from him, figures that his life is at an end. He might as well step out of this life and across the second threshold to whatever room lies beyond—but he is going to do it jauntily and he doesn't want anybody feeling sorry for him.

But people do feel sorry for him, and worry about him. He and his daughter, who have thought they have grown so far apart, find new understanding in talking with each other and not just at, or to, each other. Here is the charm, and the plot, of Mr. Barry's play.

A Charming Newcomer.

The setting is a luxurious one in modern New York, for Barry characters are usually well heeled and decently educated. Margaret Phillips, always an intense young actress, plays the role of the daughter with warmth as well as intensity. Hugh Reilly is an excellent, solid standby as a young physician, and there is an uncommonly charming performance by a newcomer, Betsy von Furstenberg, in the role of a post-debutante.

Alfred de Liagre, Jr., the producer, has directed the company of six smoothly and skillfully, and there is an attractive setting by Donald Oenslager.